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ABSTRACT

This model position description is the result of a detailed analysis of the data supplied by principals of North Central Association junior high schools. Each district ought to study the model in relation to individual needs and choose elements that fit the particular school or even the particular department within the school. The model considers the definition, basic function qualification, duties and responsibilities, rights, released time, and remuneration of the department head. (Author/IRT)

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MODEL POSITION DESCRIPTION FOR THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL DEPARTMENT HEAD

BY

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Introduction

This "model" position description is the result of a detailed analysis of the data supplied by principals of NCA junior high schools in a study made by the writers and reported in The Department Chairman in Colorado NCA Junior High/Middle Schools (Boulder, Colorado: Colorado State Committee, North Central Association, 1974). Actual written job descriptions presently adopted in a number of districts were carefully studied.

Basic assumptions, derived from the study and long term observation of the operation of junior high schools, made by the writers undergrid the preparation of this suggested position description and relate to a "philosophy" of supervision and administration in the junior high schools. We believe that:

(1) The department head in the junior high school has been poorly utilized, often misused, over the years.

(2) The department head may be expected to perform some limited administrative duties, however, his/her major contribution lies in the areas of supervision and curriculum development.

(3) The department head has generally been given inadequate direction and guidance by the administration of the school in regard to the expectations of this position.

(4) The department head must have administration support and backing if he/she is to be effective.

(5) The department head seldom has the training which prepares him/her to fulfill the responsibilities of the position.

(6) The department head ought to be appointed by the building principal with significant input from the department faculty.

(7) The department head must have the time and opportunity for supervision to go along with the responsibility.

(8) The department head should employ primarily staff authority in working with his/her department faculty.

(9) Extra remuneration for the department head will help lend credibility to the position.

(10) The department head may be expected to evaluate the departmental faculty for purposes of professional growth and improvement but should not be asked to rate teachers for tenure, salary, merit pay or dismissal.

As is the case with other school personnel who contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning, the department head often is confused in regard to the relationship between administration and supervision. Actually there is no way to draw a neat distinction between these two important concepts. A few supervisors may be located in the schools across the U.S. who are called supervisors and who work exclusively in staff authority relationships with faculty, however, more often educational leaders perform duties which embody some elements of both administration and supervision. Principals, assistant principals, coordinators and, certainly, department heads in junior high schools experience some blurring of roles. We believe the following represents a viable explanation of the operating relationships between supervision and administration as they exist in the reality of the school context today.

Supervision may be defined as actions by professional school personnel working with and through others to improve teaching and learning. School administration refers to professionals working to organize and operate the school in order to accomplish its objectives. Thus supervision may properly be regarded as one of several functions falling within the meaning of the overall term administration.

The position of department head was initially conceived and instituted because of some very real contributions which might be realized. However, somehow the performance has seldom lived up to the potential. We believe that a carefully formulated position description, adopted by the district, interpreted to the department head and related directly to the evaluation of the position would go far to improve the situation. With this in mind, the following composite "model" position description is presented. Each district ought to study it in relation to individual needs and choose elements which fit the particular school or even the particular department within the school.

POSITION DESCRIPTION

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL DEPARTMENT HEAD

The department head occupies a key position in the overall operation of the junior high school. The primary work of the department head is to provide leadership, assistance and coordination in regard to instructional improvement and curriculum development within the subject area. The effectiveness of each department rests in large measure upon the ability, personality and leadership of the department head.

Definition. The department head is a faculty member who, in addition to performing the usual duties of teaching in the department, has certain specific responsibilities for supervising and administering the work of the department.

Basic function. The department head shall be directly responsible to the principal and shall serve in a consultative relationship (mainly staff authority) with teachers in the department. The department head shall not be delegated authority which is properly reserved for the principal and shall be held responsible only for those items for which he/she is given responsibility. He/she is a facilitator, coordinator and mediator. Duties do not include teacher rating; formal evaluation and rating are the responsibility of the line administrator.

Qualifications. Candidates for department head should have most of the following:

1. An advanced degree (masters, specialist or doctors).
2. Three or more years teaching experience in the district.
3. Tenure in the district.
4. Major in the subject field (could include graduate and undergraduate work) and/or a minimum of 24 semester hours in the subject field.

5. Demonstrated superior leadership qualities.

6. A standard teaching credential.

7. Evidence of continuing study and research in his field.

8. Demonstrated superior classroom teaching.

9. Be active in professional associations--particularly hold current membership in the appropriate professional subject matter organization.

10. Graduate preparation in educational supervision (e.g., courses in such areas as supervision, curriculum development, group process, educational leadership, internship in supervision, etc.)

11. High level skills in oral and written communication.

12. Desire to be department head.

Duties and Responsibilities. The department head is expected to be the leader of the department. Broad duties and responsibilities are as follows:

(1) Organizes, coordinates and chairs departmental meetings.

(2) Serves as a two-way communication link between the administration and the department.

(3) Coordinates and facilitates instructional and curricular planning within the department.

(4) Helps all teachers in the department with their instructional problems and maximum achievement of their potential, giving special attention to non-tenure faculty members.

(5) Interprets the nature, aims, contributions and needs of the department's instructional area to the staff, the students, the patrons and the community.

(6) Maintains an inventory record of and supervises the use of departmental equipment, instructional materials and supplies.

(7) Orients teachers new to the department and department teachers new to the school.

(8) Participates in the interview, selection and assignment of departmental personnel.

(9) Assists in the scheduling of classes, teachers and students in the department.

(10) Coordinates the inservice education activities of departmental personnel.

(11) Recommends the assignment of student teachers within the department.

(12) Promotes vertical and horizontal articulation of curricular elements within the subject field.

(13) Orients substitute teachers in the department to the school and to the day's assignment.

(14) Orders and assigns instructional media, supplies and instructional budget items for the department.

(15) Provides leadership and coordination in the continual evaluation of departmental programs and instructional activity and recommends needed changes to the administration.

(16) Promotes innovation and experimentation within the department.

(17) Coordinates departmental selection of new texts and supplementary materials.

(18) Coordinates the development of the departmental budget by the departmental staff and interprets it to the administration.

(19) Participates actively in state and national subject matter associations and keeps abreast of new developments and trends in methods of instruction and curriculum patterns.

Rights of the Department Head. In order to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of the position, the department head has the right to expect certain things in return for his/her commitment to the tasks assigned. These include:

(a) To have the support of the building administrator.

(b) To have the cooperation of the departmental personnel in the implementation of the departmental and school philosophy and aims.

(c) To consult with the administration regarding departmental problems and needs.

(d) To participate in the selection of new building administrators.

(e) To take part in decisions regarding supporting services available to the department (counseling, library-media, lay assistants, etc.).

(f) To receive consideration from the school administrator concerning departmental schedules, teacher loads, room assignments and other matters concerning staff welfare.

(g) To participate in the study of all-school problems, development of alternative solutions and decisions regarding corrective action and its implementation.

Released Time. If the department head is to have the opportunity for supervision as well as the responsibility for it, he/she must have some measure of reassigned time. This may be accomplished by judicious use of substitute teachers, of course. In order to carry out supervisory responsibilities, a reasonable provision is for the release of the department head from one period of teaching per day or its equivalent (in addition to his/her normal planning period) for each five teachers in the department with the use of substitutes for longer blocks of time.

Remuneration. The department head will receive additional remuneration as a result of his/her appointment (normally in the range of $250-$1000) per academic year depending on the size of the department).

Conclusion

For the most part authorities in both administration and supervision have given limited attention to the role of the department head in the operation of the junior high school. In Colorado as across the nation, the position is traditionally found in a large proportion of districts (e.g., 89% of the NCA junior high schools in Colorado reported one or more department chairmen). There is much agreement that major objectives include the improvement of instruction and curriculum development. However, the evidence is clear that there are many conflicting expectations and perceptions of the role. For example, the department head is usually seen as a representative and leader of the department, and, at the same time, sometimes may be presumed to be a member of the administrative team. Role clarification in order to assist survival of the department head and to promote maximum contribution to the goals of the school is essential. The writers believe that the above composite model position description of the junior high school department head may be helpful in this important task.